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**Topics in Geriatrics**: **Dance Therapy to Improve Balance in Older Adults**  
According to the CDC, more than one in four older adults over the age of 65 fall each year. Of those that fall, one of five falls will cause a serious injury like a broken bone or head injury. After falling once, an older adult’s chance of falling doubles. Dance therapy as an intervention for older adults is effective at improving balance as well as providing opportunities for older adults to interact with peers within the community.

**Objectives:**The objectives of this page are to:

1. Learn more about dance therapy for older adults.
2. Discuss changes in the older adult that can occur due to dance therapy.
3. Learn about current evidence regarding dance therapy for older adults.

**Information about Dance Therapy:**

What is Dance Therapy:

Dance is currently used in many independent living facilities and nursing homes as an opportunity for older adults to exercise in order to improve strength and balance while also being in a social setting. Dance therapy is described as a complex sensorimotor rhythmic activity that integrates multiple physical, social, and cognitive elements.2 Dance therapy can include choreographed dances, single, partner, or group settings, line dances, or protocols specifically developed for the older adult. Dance therapy movements typically include single leg stance, coordination activities, marching, and large arm movements.

What Can Be Improved With Dance Therapy:

Although typically aimed at improving balance to reduce falls, dance therapy also improves strength, coordination, and may also improve cognition. Positive psychosocial benefits are also typically an outcome of dance therapy as it encourages older adults to participate in an activity within a group setting.

**Evidence for Dance Therapy:**

Several studies about dance therapy in the older adult have found dance to be effective in improving multiple aspects of balance, strength, and overall fitness as well as positive psychosocial benefits.

In community dwelling older adults, Britten et al found that an 8-week dance program consisting of one 90-minute dance class per week was effective in reducing risk factors for falling. The pre/posttest study showed a significant increase in moderate to vigorous physical activity with a decrease in sitting time during the weekdays, statistically significant decreases in the mean Geriatric Depression Scale and fear of falling score, as well as a significant decrease in the amount of time it took for participants to complete the TUG.

Kattenstroth et al found that 1 hour/week of dance classes for 6 months created improvements in many areas of life for older adults. This study found beneficial improvements in parameters such as posture and reaction times, as well as tactile, cognitive, and motor performance. There was also improvement in subjective well-being, although no changes were found in cardio-respiratory fitness. This study also highlighted that those with the lowest pretest scores were the subjects who showed the most improvement.

When compared to a control group, Shigematsu et al found that women aged 72-87 had significant improvements in single-leg balance with eyes closed, functional reach, and walking time around 2 cones after participating in a dance-based aerobic program for 60 minutes/day for 3 days/week for 12 weeks.

Federici et al looked at older adults ages 58 to 68 years old and compared a control group which performed no exercise to a dance-based exercise group which participated for 3 months. There was a significant difference in the exercise group, measured by four balance tests: Tinetti, Romberg, improved Romberg, and the Sit up and go. The exercise group also showed positive improvements in psychosocial aspects.

**References:**

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